

SignalViewpoints

Solutions elusive, but housing advances are in sight

SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



Clatsop County's housing crisis reverberates all the way to the halls of Congress.

This spring, U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici addressed a roomful of local leaders to crack the code of the South County's ongoing housing crisis, one which sees a dearth of affordable workforce housing — a problem hindering economic development, leading to a rise in homelessness and higher housing costs for everyone.

Bonamici is only one of the legislators at all levels of government seeking answers, along with housing officials, developers, business leaders and cities seeking to keep pace with population and economic growth.

In late April, Brendan Buckley of Johnson Economics and Matt Hastie of Angelo Planning Group returned to Seaside for an interpretation of their Clatsop County Housing Strategies Report.

Results of the housing report, delivered this spring, shine a light on each community, analyzing the countywide housing supply, housing and demographic trends. The study provides details on population growth, household characteristics and available land.

Along with broader findings, they offered a discussion of Seaside itself.

"The idea was to assess the current housing inventories," Buckley said.

Authors sought to come up with projection of needed housing, the inventory of remaining buildable residential land and identify gaps and opportunities for housing throughout the county.

By the numbers

Seaside's housing profile is a treasure trove of data.

There is an "acute estimated shortage of lower priced rental units," the study, co-authored by Angelo Planning Group and Johnson Economics, states. "As in most markets there is a continuous need for units at the lowest levels, which usually requires subsidized rents."

Seaside, they report, is constrained by land and housing unit capacity — with only 69 vacant potentially buildable acres, out of 5,200 vacant areas countywide. By comparison, Cannon Beach has 86 buildable acres and Gearhart 146 vacant buildable acres.

According to Portland State University data, Seaside will grow at the second highest rate in the county, behind Warrenton, at about 1% per year. Seaside has a



Seaside cottages could play a big role in the city's future housing stock.

GROWING DEMAND: A TIMELINE

The situation is one that has grown steadily over the decades: the 1946 Signal reported a "heavy demand for small homes." The population had gone from about 1,500 in 1930 to almost 5,000 after the war.

That was the post-war boom, but surges of population, both primary residents, second-homeowners and visitors, has kept that struggle alive.

In 1989, the housing shortage in Seaside — along with expansion of downtown parking and public restrooms was a key item in the city goals.

The city passed a vacation rental ordinance in 1992, taking many properties off the market that could have been used as long-term rentals or affordable housing.

By 2007, Clatsop Housing Solutions held a conference to address the issue. The event, at the convention center, drew experts from around the state.

And in 2012, the city dug in with an analysis of land needs and housing trends.

In 2017, city councilors provided a list intended to

remove hurdles from providing additional rental opportunities in residential zones, commissioners presented additional proposals to encourage long-term rental housing development, including plans to modify parking requirements and rules for accessory dwelling units.

Last November, Brendan Buckley of Johnson Economics addressed Seaside City Council members to present two hours of numbers confirming what many in the audience already knew: there's not enough workforce housing and for too many, housing is completely out of reach.

The Clatsop County Housing Study was delivered early this year, with participation of the five county cities of Warrenton, Seaside, Cannon Beach, Astoria and Gearhart, with the unincorporated townships around the county.

In late April, Buckley, with Matt Hastie of Angelo Planning Group returned to Seaside for an interpretation of their report.

40% ownership rate among permanent ownership.

Seaside's population of 6,644 is expected to increase to 7,739 in 2038, a growth of about 1,095 people. 12% of Seaside's population is within the federal poverty rate.

Meanwhile, the median home sale in Clatsop County is \$298,000; Gearhart \$402,000. Countywide, the average is \$310,000.

Average rent levels in Seaside, for a one-bedroom apartment are \$825 per month, one-bedrooms \$1,200 and three-bedroom \$1,500. The estimated average of all units is \$1,155, slightly more than the county average of \$1,144.

In a comparison of current housing need and supply in Seaside, the greatest unmet need

is within the \$35,000-\$49,999 income range, or houses priced at \$190,000-\$350,000. Those households with an income level of less than \$90,000 have an unmet need of 295. The greatest unmet need for rental dwellings is in the \$1,100-\$1,500 range.

In Gearhart, Cannon Beach and Seaside, a large share of homes are used for vacation or second homes. Seaside will need an additional 637 units by 2038, a 33% increase, and a need for 151 new rental units by 2038, an increase of 21.8%. Overall Seaside is expected to see a 30.2% increase in total housing need by 2038.

Newly built housing supply will tend to be more expensive.

The middle class will have to work harder to get housing and the poor will be still further away.

"Your study is confirming, in some ways, our worst fears and concerns," Mayor Jay Barber told consultants at a City Council presentation. "I think the big issue is what you're going to be recommending as solutions."

"My biggest takeaway is we have plenty of housing," councilor Seth Morrissy added. "It's just not being used efficiently."

Solutions?

"Easy" — and not-so-easy — solutions have already been analyzed and utilized, when available: housing grants, federal funding, urban renewal, even a city code amendment designed to promote accessory dwelling units.

As the Portland area spreads outward, councilwoman Tita Montero said, the city could have an even greater need than pro-

jected by Portland State University data.

That could lead to a new look at the city's urban growth boundary — a discussion tabled by the Planning Commission two years ago in advance of updated projections.

Reductions or waivers of system development charges could lower prices for developers of affordable or workforce units — but reduced charges on one end inevitably lead to higher costs for taxpayers, who would ultimately bear the costs of new utilities and roads.

Relaxing street parking rules — from two to 1.5, as the housing study's authors propose — could make it easier for developers to build, but could crowd already overfilled streets.

Vacation rental units are already in the sights of the Planning Commission, which will be meeting with the City Council on the topic at a July work session. The proliferation of online services like Vacasa and Airbnb "have made it much easier for property owners to rent out and manage their properties remotely," the housing report states.

Vacation rental dwellings represent a "commercial venture in a residential zone," City Councilor Randy Frank said. "That's coming at the expense of their neighbors."

A look ahead

Solutions are tantalizing, and dizzying: zoning rules designed to promote multifamily housing, accessory dwelling units, incentives for development.

What-ifs include possible development of the high school and middle school as housing.

In the past councilors have mulled rezoning portions of downtown to allow loft or apartment living above the city's historic buildings. There are undoubtedly many residents who would love to make their home in the swing of things.

One of my favorite ideas is to take a new look at the city's "cottage clusters" — single-family dwellings with a courtyard or what the study's authors call a "communal design," ideally suited for the repertoire of homes from the 1920s, '30s, '40s and '50s.

Without cooperation of neighbors and residents, even the best ideas may be destined to stall.

What will be required is sensible low-impact solutions that work without degrading the quality of life for those of us who already live here.

Maybe it's all a matter of vocabulary.

No one wants to live next to a "homeless shelter."

But a subsidized cottage cluster with potential for homeowner equity? It could be a start.

Seaside cottages like this one could be just what we need

In the summer of 1977 I met Curtis Watkins in New York City. We were habitués of a cafe in Greenwich Village. After a long hiatus, we met again in 1997; he was taking a class with an Iyengar yoga teacher who I was writing about. After that, we made a point to stay in touch.

Watkins is the co-author of a new book called "The Field Guide To Emotions." Professionally, Watkins has been an actor, a cab driver, and a construction worker. When we met in '77 he was one of the first male flight attendants for TWA. For the last 20 or so years, Watkins has been an executive coach whose work is rooted in somatics. His co-author Dan Newby is also an executive coach, and author of "The Unopened Gift: A Primer in Emotional Literacy."

Reframing emotions as a practical tool is a relatively new concept.

"We've both been coaches doing executive trainings since 1999," Watkins said. "Dan's area of study is emotions and mine is somatics." The process of writ-

VIEW FROM THE PORCH

EVE MARX

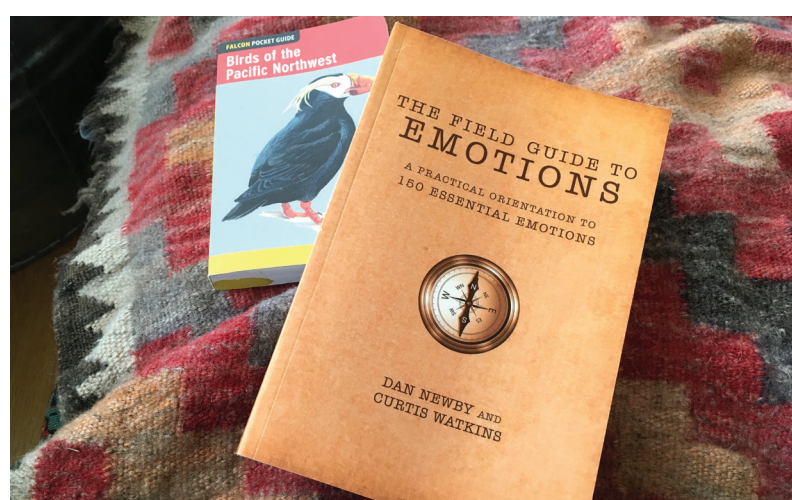


ing the book, he said, took more than a year. "I made a grid and we came up with all the different emotions we wanted to describe and explain."

Watkins said most humans walking the earth are pretty much emotional illiterates. He's hoping to change that.

"Two hundred years ago, only 10% of humans on the planet could read and write, and now probably 90% of people can read and write," he said. "Right now I think only about 10% of the population are emotionally literate. But in 200 years we could have 90% of the human population having the ability to recognize and identify their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others."

The design and format of "The Field Guide to Emotions" is easy



Eve Marx

Curtis Watkins' "A Field Guide To Emotions" helps people identify and recognize their own emotions. Plus it has elements in common with a birders field guide.

to read and attractive. Besides the expected emotions of fear, love, pride, pity, and passion, the book delves into emotions we may be less comfortable talking about, like envy, indignation, and pessimism. It's interesting to learn that when we're feeling guilty,

our bodies express that as heaviness. Guilty people breathe more slowly and shallowly. People who feel frustrated experience tightness in the jaw; people who feel entitled are prone to whine. Hopeful people stand up straighter. While sentimental people become eas-

ily attached to specific people, and even objects, and approach the world with an open heart, their sentimentality may interfere with their ability to accept or even understand ideas based on logic.

Because the emotions defined and described in the book are organized A-Z, Watkins said his co-author originally wanted to call the book a dictionary.

He resisted and came up with the book's title.

"I'm a bird watcher and I've always loved field guides," he said.

Watkins said coaching work never gets old. "I'm curious about people and continue to be curious." What he enjoys most is experiencing clients becoming more aware of their bodies as domains of wisdom and knowledge, and not just a machine to carry their heads around.

"As a culture, we've relegated the body to an 'it,'" he said, "rather than a being. My work is to engage people to live their lives more fully."



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